

**YOUTH COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL LEAVERS STUDY**

SPONSORED BY THE BUREAU OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE SERVICES

**CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE
COMMUNITY HEALTH RESEARCH GROUP**

SECTION I.

Statement of Problem

Based on the 1990 US Census data on selected labor force and community characteristics, Tennessee's population included 298,072 youth between 16 and 19 years of age. Of these, 13% or about 40,000 were not enrolled in school and had not graduated from high school. While 38% of these high school leavers were employed or in the Armed Forces, another 19% were unemployed, but looking for employment, while fully 43% were not in the labor force. The latter are largely homemakers.

Who are these high school leavers -- why have they left school and what has and will become of them? These are some of the questions this study seeks to answer.

According to a 1992 State of the Child in Tennessee report, KIDS COUNT, 15,223 students in grades 9-12 dropped out of Tennessee schools during the 1990-91 school year. The state's dropout rate was 18% of 9th graders dropping out of school before the end of 12th grade for 1992-1993. The annual event rate was about 5% (Student, Teacher and School performance, 1994: Ninth Annual Report Submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, January 28, 1994 by the State Board of Education, p. 12).

School leavers pose a serious problem for the State of Tennessee in that a population's educational level impacts and influences the quality of the work force and the economic opportunities of its citizens. Low educational attainment is associated with the need for public assistance and is a drain on the state economy. It is estimated that less than 40% of AFDC adults have completed high school. It is expected that adult school leavers are at higher risk of unemployment, poverty, have excess health and mental health problems, lack health insurance coverage, and suffer other adverse consequences.

Among other health and social problems, youth who leave school early are thought to be at risk for problems with alcohol and other drugs. Studies have linked substance abuse to increased school dropout rates, increased criminal activity, a higher driver-motor vehicular crash rate, and excess susceptibility to disease. Long before they drop out, at-risk students develop behavior patterns which further hinder their education. They may